

Message Text

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PAGE 01 ATHENS 03823 101026Z
ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSC-01 TRSE-00 IO-13 CIAE-00
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FM AMEMBASSY ATHENS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5766
INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA
AMEMBASSY NICOSIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L ATHENS 3823

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, GR
SUBJECT: CABINET RESHUFFLE APPEARS IN THE OFFING

REF: ATHENS 3546

1. THERE IS GROWING ANTICIPATION THAT PRIME MINISTER CARAMANLIS INTENDS TO MAKE A LIMITED CHANGE AMONG SEVERAL PROMINENT FIGURES IN HIS CABINET. SO FAR, CARAMANLIS HAS MAINTAINED HIS CHARACTERISTIC SILENCE, BUT MANY OF OUR CONTACTS ARE ALL BUT CERTAIN IN THEIR OWN MINDS THAT SHIFTS ARE IN THE WIND, AND THE PRESS HAS GIVEN THE SUBJECT HEAVY COVERAGE DURING THE PAST WEEK. THE TIMING IS UNCERTAIN, BUT THE EXPECTATION IS THAT IT MAY BE ANNOUNCED MOMENTARILY OR BEFORE THE PRIME MINISTER TRAVELS TO THE U.S. FOR THE NATO SUMMIT.

2. THE CHANGES FOCUS ON TWO IMPORTANT FIGURES FROM THE CENTER OF THE POLITICAL AREAN AND ON SEVERAL KEY ECONOMIC MINISTRIES AS WELL AS THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS. CONSTANTINE MITSOTAKIS IS SAID TO BE DESTINTED TO TAKE OVER THE MINISTRY OF COORDINATION FROM GEORGE RALLIS WHO, IT IS THOUGHT, WILL GO EITHER TO THE MINISTRY OF FOREING AFFAIRS OR BE APPOINTED TO THE SECOND DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER SLOT. IT
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PAGE 02 ATHENS 03823 101026Z

IS WIDELY ACCEPTED AMONG OUR CONTACTS THAT PANAYIOTIS PAPALIGOURAS WILL LEAVE THE MFA MAINLY FOR HEALTH REASONS -- INDEED, SEVERAL NEWSPAPERS REPORT HE HAS ALREADY SUBMITTED HIS RESIGNATION. ATHANASIOS KANELLOPOULOS, WHO DECLARED HIS INDEPENDENCE FROM THE UDC SOME MONTHS AGO, IS REPORTEDLY IN LINE FOR THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE, REPLACING JOHN BOULOS WHO WOULD RETURN TO HIS FORMER POSITION AS MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE. IN ADDITION, NEW DEMOCRACY

PARTY SOURCES INDICATE THERE MAY BE SHIFTS IN SEVERAL MINISTRIES, INCLUDING THE MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY AND ENERGY (MILTADIS EVERT) AND THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (ALEXANDROS PAPADONGONAS), ALTHOUGH THESE SHIFTS ARE CONSIDERED LESS CERTAIN.

3. AS REPORTED IN REFTTEL, THE ARGUMENTS FOR CARAMALIS ALTERING HIS CABINET ARE THREEFOLD -- HE WANTS TO INVIGORATE THE PERFORMANCE OF HIS GOVERNMENT, HE SEEKS TO BROADEN THE BASE OF HIS SUPPORT BY INCLUDING ELEMENTS FROM THE CENTER AND HE HOPES TO USE MITSOTAKIS TO COUNTER THE CHALLENGE OF PAPANDREOU. HOWEVER, THERE IS CONSIDERABLE RESISTANCE TO SUCH A CHANGE FROM WITHIN THE NEW DEMOCRACY PARTY. FOR INSTANCE THOSE ND POLITICIANS WHO ASPIRE TO SUCCEED CARAMANLIS FEAR THE THREAT POSED BY MITSOTAKIS' RE-ENTRY INTO HIGH OFFICE. ELEMENTS OF THE CENTER/LEFT, ESPECIALLY PUBLISHER CHRISTOS LAMBRAKIS, ARE ALSO HIGHLY CRITICAL AND HAVE RIDICULED THE GOVERNMENT FOR SEEKING SOLUTIONS TO ITS PROBLEMS BY TURNING TO THE CENTER, AND THESE ELEMENTS BRAND SUCH A MOVE AS A SECOND "APOSTASY" (REFERRING TO THE 1965 EVENTS WHICH SPLIT THE CENTER UNION PARTY OF GEORGE PAPANDREOU).

4. COMMENT: ADDING WHAT APPEARS TO BE FINAL SUBSTANCE TO ABOVE SPECULATION, WE HAVE JUST LEARNED THAT MITSOTAKIS HAS CALLED A MEETING OF ALL SENIOR OFFICIALS OF THE MINISTRY OF COORDINATION AT 12:30 TO "MEET" HIM IN HIS NEW CAPACITY AS MINISTER.
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PAGE 03 ATHENS 03823 101026Z

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